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REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Senator Kennedy Gets His Woman

Senator Edward Kennedy, once expelled from Harvard for having a friend take his Spanish exam, has ruled that literary critic Carol Iannone doesn't have the academic credentials to serve on the National Council on the Humanities. Bowing to the Senator's personal leadership, his Senate committee on Labor and Human Resources turned down her nomination by a 9-8 vote.

If you believe this petty act had anything to do with academic resumes, you probably also believe the Senator made a wrong turn on Chapquiddick Island. Professor Iannone drew opposition because she shares the political views that have consistently won presidential elections, instead of those considered acceptable in the fever swamps like the Modern Language Association. A conservative literary critic, Professor Iannone ran afoul of the guardians of political orthodoxy by daring to write about the corrupting effects of the current obsession with gender and race. Brigades of the politically correct, led by the Modern Language Association and Guggenheim Foundation Chairman Joel Conarroe, formed up to mount a campaign of vilification against her. "Racist," they screamed.

Viscount Claiborne Pell was instantly persuaded, but until the last hour it seemed that a majority of the committee would resist the slander campaign. Senator Barbara Mikulski, for example, assured the candidate that in her view the charge that Professor Iannone lacked scholarly credentials was typical academic snobbery; but later Senator Mikulski offered her regrets to Senator Orrin Hatch, explaining that Senator Kennedy had made the defeat of this nominee a personal priority. Similarly, Senators Paul Simon and Christopher Dodd voted against the nominee despite earlier inclinations, leaving Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico as the only Democratic vote to confirm.

Prior to the vote, Senator Kennedy went to some lengths to persuade Professor Iannone and her sponsors that she would be better off without a public hearing on the nomination. Such eagerness to avoid a public hearing should be a clear warning to future nominees, but this time the Senator's persuasions let him do his work in the dark. The public and press lost the opportunity to witness the Kennedy machismo in its full glory, beating up on a 43-year-old woman scholar whose sole offense was to hold politically incorrect opinions.